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Anaya's funeral: A murder mystery that revealed deep divisions in rebel ranks

Guerrillas Vs. Guerrillas

It sounded like one of Shakespeare's darker plots. Two weeks ago Nicaraguan officials announced that Mélida Anaya Montes, second-in-command of El Salvador's Popular Liberation Forces (FPL), had been murdered in her Managua "safe house"—stabbed 82 times with an ice pick. Salvador Cayetano Carpio, the FPL commander, came to Managua for her funeral. Friends said the guerrilla leader looked ill and exhausted; despite the stifling heat, he wore a thick white sweater. Then last week the Nicaraguan authorities announced that Cayetano Carpio himself was dead. In the presence of his wife, Emma, an FPL spokesman said, the 63-year-old Marxist leader pulled out a pistol and shot himself.

His death was more than a human tragedy. It revealed the deep divisions within the guerrilla ranks. The Sandinistas said that Cayetano Carpio made his "tragic decision" after learning that some of his closest associates had murdered Anaya Montes. The Nicaraguan government quickly arrested six Salvadoran leftists, including Rogelio A. Bazzaglia Recinos, a member of the FPL's central command. In a reflex response, the Nicaraguans also accused the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency of helping with the plot. But later in the week even the FPL contradicted that charge. Bazzaglia Recinos was no double agent, a guerrilla spokesman maintained; he killed Anaya Montes, the guerrilla said, because of differences over politics.

Cayetano: A suicide?

Christian Poveda—Julliet

Violence: To outsiders neither explanation sounded convincing. American officials say that Cayetano Carpio was hardly the type to commit suicide; his reputation was that of a dedicated revolutionary. In the 1950s he endured jail and brutal torture by Salvadoran police. After his release, CIA officials say, he lived in the Soviet Union and Cuba before returning to El Salvador to run the country's Communist Party. He left the party a few years later when his cohorts refused to endorse his unswerving views that violence was necessary to bring about change. In 1970 he organized the FPL, now the second most powerful guerrilla organization in El Salvador. Even after the Salvadoran security forces killed his daughter in a demonstration in San Salvador, he fought on from his headquarters in the hills—where he was known as the Ho Chi Minh of Central America.

Cayetano Carpio may have had any number of enemies. U.S. and Salvadoran officials speculate that the deaths in Managua were related to a leadership struggle among the five guerrilla groups that make up the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front. Cayetano Carpio had often quarreled with the less radical groups over the issue of negotiations with the Salvadoran government. A firm believer in a Vietnam-style prolonged war, he was deeply suspicious that other leaders would betray the revolution for short-term gains. Last autumn he did agree to sign a document demanding talks with the government—but if the government had actually agreed to negotiations, he would have been the first to back away. More moderate guerrillas may now see new opportunities to meet the government halfway.

Even more to the point, the guerrillas may be able to take advantage of Cayetano Carpio's death to consolidate their forces. He recently resisted a new plan to create a single guerrilla force with Joaquín Villalobos of the People's Revolutionary Army as its leader. With the FPL now deprived of its top commanders, the rank and file might be persuaded to accept the proposal. In that case, the guerrilla coalition could turn the loss of two of its most dedicated leaders to its gain.

KIM ROGAL with JAMES LeMOYNE in San Salvador and SUSAN MORGAN in Managua